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introduction

to write to write to wit
sound sound comes and then
watch out goes
nothing i think of
this one but a
start
start
i have been
waiting too
long now for
poems they
will come with-
out me with-
out false ges-
ture withou-
t trouble
s

Steve Thomas

(from Fifteen Mysteries)

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SPRING 1974

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Cover: Hospital Gospel Hicks
B. K. Douglas

NONE SUCH HOUSE

In my father's house, there was no father. Or, my father had no house. Either one, take your pick, as long as something's missing. So, in my father's house, we ran in the corridors, slid down bannisters, looking for father. Or, coming upon father sleeping in a field, we asked him: "Poppa, have you seen the house?" "Ask your mother," said the father of the house. "House stands for mother, doesn't that school teach you anything?" But mother had locked herself in her own father's house. "No thanks, I don't have any," she answered when people asked about her children. "I have flowers, thunderbolts and little fishes, but not lawyers, lovers and suicides." We tried, we really tried. Tommy almost drowned from too much water; Cleo learned to wiggle her ears like the flowers in the field and Alexander struck everything in sight. But one of us was always hungry, the other tired and the third one cried and cried. So we all lived together like everyone else in the none such house. Mother sang behind the locked door, "There's no place like father," Father dreamed of stones, leave no stone unturned, and the children changed their mind, morning noon and night. When there was nothing left of my father's house, we multiplied it by three. Junior got the window and jumped from it. Sister took the key and gave it away and I, I took to sea looking for father beating about the bush. Let sleeping dogs run deep.

Dori Katz

(Courtesy of The North American Review)

the journal

a room

spread out in that big loose body of mine
my mother wouldn't stop looking at me
with her institution
eyes

(i visited her with my father's eyes
each month like the curse had
reminded her she was a woman)

my neighbors read
the poems i couldn't write
during that blank entry
they wiped my children's noses
they left food and
notes on my refrigerator

door
stuck for months

carol edelstein



Marie in Bed

Marie in bed
receives the gift of the rose
as a rosary, clutching
in her other hand
she holds the hand of her boy
kneading his small knuckles
till they blush
the child watches her
nervously like a bird,
fidgets when his eyes fall
on the tubes winding
into her arm
she speaks softly, her words
soothing him over like water
he chirps back half in Portuguese
half in a new sound
the father rises
apologetically from his chair
and waits as Marie
plants a kiss on the boy's cheek;
a red flower
they leave: the nurse comes
Marie sighs as she puts the stem
in the cold water
she indicates the red bud
its petals pursed in a fist
and the glassy photo of her boy
nearby on the table
There, she says, see—
my two roses.

Bonnie Bernstein

THE WAR APPEARS . . .

"And so—the war—appears to be over."

The words startle me, but they do not ruffle the speaker. He goes on talking. His face does not reveal the slightest emotion. I study the lines around his eyes, hoping for some slight hint of joy. I see none. Puzzled, I continue staring at his face. I am no longer listening. His lips move, reading a script. His words go on and on. And on.

"And so—the war" Those pauses. Hesitation for emphasis. Just a touch of drama. Who is it who used to do that on the radio? "This—is London." Every night. We are clustered about our console radio which looks like a Wurlitzer without the bubbles. "This—is London." A kind of chill to it. Nightly horror. "Twelve hundred Nazi bombers over London's Kensington District last night." Radio, in the *Times* month after month after month. Flames billowing, walls toppling, entire blocks gutted. And is it possible for human beings to plan a raid like that? Plan and execute it?

Execute. A general—our side—firing a pistol at the temple of a civilian—their side. Distance, three feet. A grainy shot. A puff of smoke. A grimace.

"And so—the hand—that held—the dagger—plunged it—in the back—of its neighbor." Have I got it right? I can hear it, word for word. Where was I sitting? Perhaps by the same radio. Or at school. Whose hand? Which war?

War? Are you kidding? The sound of running in hallways. Excitement. Shouts. Jokes and giggling laughter. My first year at a boarding school I hate and this, a Sunday in December, the first moment of joy since the term began. Bombers in Hawaii! You're kidding! No, honest. Listen.

The oppressive boredom of life lifts like billows of smoke. Come on, we'll print an "extra!" Swept along, I help type ditto masters—hectograph—help run them through the machine, smelling the alcohol. Running down long corridors, leather soles clattering. "Extra! Extra!" The glory of it: spreading the news. Rumors ricochet through dormitories: Congress in special session; bombers sighted off San Francisco; no classes tomorrow!

I was fourteen that winter. I had read about a boy sixteen who lied about his age and went to fight the Huns in *the* world war, 1917, and saw action at Verdun. Was it really possible that I could be in uniform in two years? Actually see action? Could I fake the fact that I didn't shave yet? Could I lower my voice? Could I escape this monotony, this dullness, these flaking walls of my life in two years? Could I even wait two years?

Wait. Hurry up and wait. On the double. Line up. Shut up. Let's go. Wait. The smell of Lysol. The muttering, grunting of fifty men on the ward. Wait. Radio down at the end of the corridor somewhere, always on. "Americans advanced an unprecedented fifty-two miles across France today." "Approaching the Belgian border." "Approaching the Rhine." Lucky bastards.

"Who's for 'Bug Pool'?" It's Creepy with his dented wheelchair and leg stumps covered with a G.I. blanket, out to make his daily ration.

"You're on," I say and he stops one wheel, spinning in between my bed and the next.

"Nickles?" he asks.

"Dimes."

"Sucker."

"I know." I shrug. What the hell?

Fumbling, I pull a dime from my bathrobe pocket and drop it in the filthy water glass. He adds a second. I heave myself up to a sitting position, legs over the sides. He waits for my spasm of coughing and spitting. Then he puts the blindfold on me.

Clinging to the headrail with one hand, I slam my other hand against the wall. Nothing.

He takes the blindfold and we each add a dime to the glass. He swings. Nothing. My turn. Sixty cents in the glass now. Blindfold. I try to see the wall in my mind's eye. Slam! Contact! The scratchy hide of a roach is under the heel of my hand. I rock my hand twice, squeezing out juices.

"Bastard," he says mildly.

I shrug and collect the kitty. "Another round?" I ask. He shrugs, drops a dime. I drop a dime.

And so this war appears to be over. A man's face is saying the words. He is not elated. Were we ever? There were photographs years ago of people cheering in Times Square. So it must be that people cheered in Times Square. For a day. Half a day, maybe. Where was I? Some air strip. Out of the hospital and back on some air strip. It was hot. You could feel the heat as you breathed in. A lot of talk about the big bomb. I was tired of bigger and bigger bombs. The "block buster" was what we used on Berlin. Wasn't that enough? "Atomic?" Another propaganda stunt.

"No kidding, this is different."

"Why 'atomic'?"

"Like it splits atoms. Destroyed the whole city."

"So? We did it already in Dresden."

"With *one bomb*?"

"One bomb?"

Interest flickered for a moment. A sensation almost like that December Sunday four years earlier. No, only an echo of it. One bomb? That was at least different. So maybe we wouldn't be going to the Pacific after all.

An amo truck comes in from headquarters with cases of warm beer. Small bottles.

"Two each," the lieutenant says. "Only two each."

"You heard him," the sergeant says. "Only two each. Take three and I'll bust your ass."

"What's the matter, Sarge," someone shouts, "someone take your pretty war away?"

Laughter. Laughter dies. We drink, sitting on the hot concrete, leaning against the truck. My fatigues are soaked with sweat. The beer is vile. The war is over.

Before me the flickering face on the television screen disappears and there are news shots of soldiers marching. I have turned the sound off. But the images continue. Like memory before sleep. Men are marching, but it is not clear whether they are marching to something or back home again.

I have done my share of marching. In New York, for example, from Central Park down town, half a million of us on a cloudy, cold day. A strong sense of indignation. A family march. Wife beside me and two sons. Line up. Wait. Just a bit longer. How many are there? A million. There must be a million. Once we begin we own the city. We are solid across the street and we are making our statement so loud that no one can possibly miss it.

"They've *got* to respond."

"It's fantastic."

"Nothing like this *ever*."

Such a marvelous war against war! No body of citizens has done such a thing in our lifetime and our government is not one which can close its eyes.

A year later: another march. Up at midnight and drive nine hours. Seven students in the station wagon and not one can work a manual shift. I drive, feeling both needed and obsolete. Once again, line up. Wait. Be ready to go. Another wait. Please don't scatter. Now, let's close it up. Close up those lines. We're being photographed from the air—don't leave any gaps. Crossing the Potomac the bridge is full, solid, from sidewalk to sidewalk. Have human

beings ever done this on this bridge in this capital, in this nation? Can they possibly miss the statement? Of course they can't. No one can look at this and not surrender. No one.

We approach The Pentagon. It is a Bastille, a Kremlin. We are in a harder mood than the year before, a bit tougher. Figures mount the ramparts, seize control of the rim. They have brought hanks of rope and lower them to the crowd. One by one, others climb the ropes, hand over hand. Adults receive applause in this young-people's war. Laughter and cheers. We are on the winning side. There is nothing they can do.

But we are wrong. Once again. Click: the mood changes when all those young soldiers— young as my students—put on masks. They are no longer young now. They are no longer men. Click: the mood down-shifts a second time as they snap bayonets into their rifles. Are they kidding? They are not kidding. Click: there is the first sound of tear gas being fired. A kind of "sprog!" A gentle sound. Subtle as the rattle of a snake. And right after, a crowd-wail as an area is abandoned. Pockets of bare lawns open, puffs of smoke in the center. I am left dazed with indecision: must I fight to stop fighting? Will they listen to nothing else? "Sprog!" And I am coughing. I cannot see. I am running and I cannot see.

Back across the river at twilight. A tattered retreat. No conversation. On my way to the car I pass the Lincoln Memorial. Somehow it seems surprising that it is not boarded up. It is there, open. The statue is lit. I stop off for a few minutes. That huge brooding face and my little one stare at each other.

"What else? What else can we possibly do?" And of course there is no answer. For the second time that day, tears.

"And so—the war—appears to be over." Marching men on the screen become an aircraft carrier; aircraft carrier becomes a cluster of bombers flying at incredible heights, leaving trails. If the war is really over why the bombers? Why does he keep talking? Did he really say that the war was over or did I imagine it? Perhaps once again we think we are at the end when actually it is only the middle. Or another beginning.

It is a June morning and I am visiting a law professor and his wife. The war is long since over. The spring air is gentle and fresh. The morning paper shouts that North Korea has attacked South Korea. Where is Korea?

I, down at the breakfast table first, see the headlines. Shock. A tinge of the old excitement—like a rape-murder with one's coffee. But, no, that's no way to react. I'm no adolescent. My hostess comes to the table. She reads the news over my shoulder, speechless.

Her husband comes down, fully dressed, ready for the class he will teach at Harvard Law School. He is older than I, old enough to have been a legal aid in Washington when I was a Pfc. He has heard the news on the radio while dressing.

"Well," he says, "here we go again." He rubs his hands in what I take to be mock enthusiasm. "This is going to be a good one." He looks at his wife, grinning, "Start packing. It's back to Washington. I still have a few contacts. Maybe even the same house." And to me, "You can't beat Georgetown in a good national emergency. Don't judge Washington by what you see between the wars. It's a war city, right down the line." And to his wife, "right?" He is grinning. She is not.

How easy it is to remember him in cartoon form. The happy warrior. Tens of thousands of them in happy Washington. But somehow I cannot stay out of the cartoon. I am there with him. It is very unsettling.

I get up and shut off the image. The light shrinks to a dot. I should leave, go to bed. But my unfinished beer is in my hand. I sit again, sipping without pleasure. It is warm and flat.

I should never have lingered. The screen is black, but the pictures keep coming.

We are on a beautiful beach in Biloxi, Mississippi. It is midnight, a summer Saturday night. We are sitting under a palm tree which casts a moonlight-shadow on the sand. We are here not by choice but because the Army has assigned us to Keesler Field which we describe without affection as the asshole of the universe.

We are drinking Southern Comfort from the bottle. Shot by shot we begin to forget that we are in the army and homesick and very young and untested. We all know that at the end of the bottle we will leave the beach and *do* something, *prove* something. But we are not sure yet what form it will take.

We tell each other about farmers' daughters and the men who give them the works. Warmed up, we tell about the WAC who had been raped by every single man in Squadron R last month—all 728 of them in six hours of steady work. Or was it Squadron D? We talk about what the men are getting in France while we're rotting away in this stateside swamp. Those Frenchies will do anything for a G.I. Anything. We recite case after case, proving conclusively the superiority of our sex.

Then we set out for the whore house. It has been building toward that, of course. But no one has mentioned it until the oldest and wisest of us announces that it is time to get some ass.

This is a statement, not a question. A declaration. A newspaper headline.

Never mind the war which followed. It was not pretty. Dirty, in fact. Besides, I was more-or-less a failure. She said some things that just about tore my guts out and I was lucky to get out of there with my wounds hidden.

At dawn we end up on that same beach, veterans. We're not talking much. The old jokes seem disgusting. We lean against the concrete seawall, watching an uncertain sunrise—a gradual light confused and muddied by overcast. The dawn is making no promises.

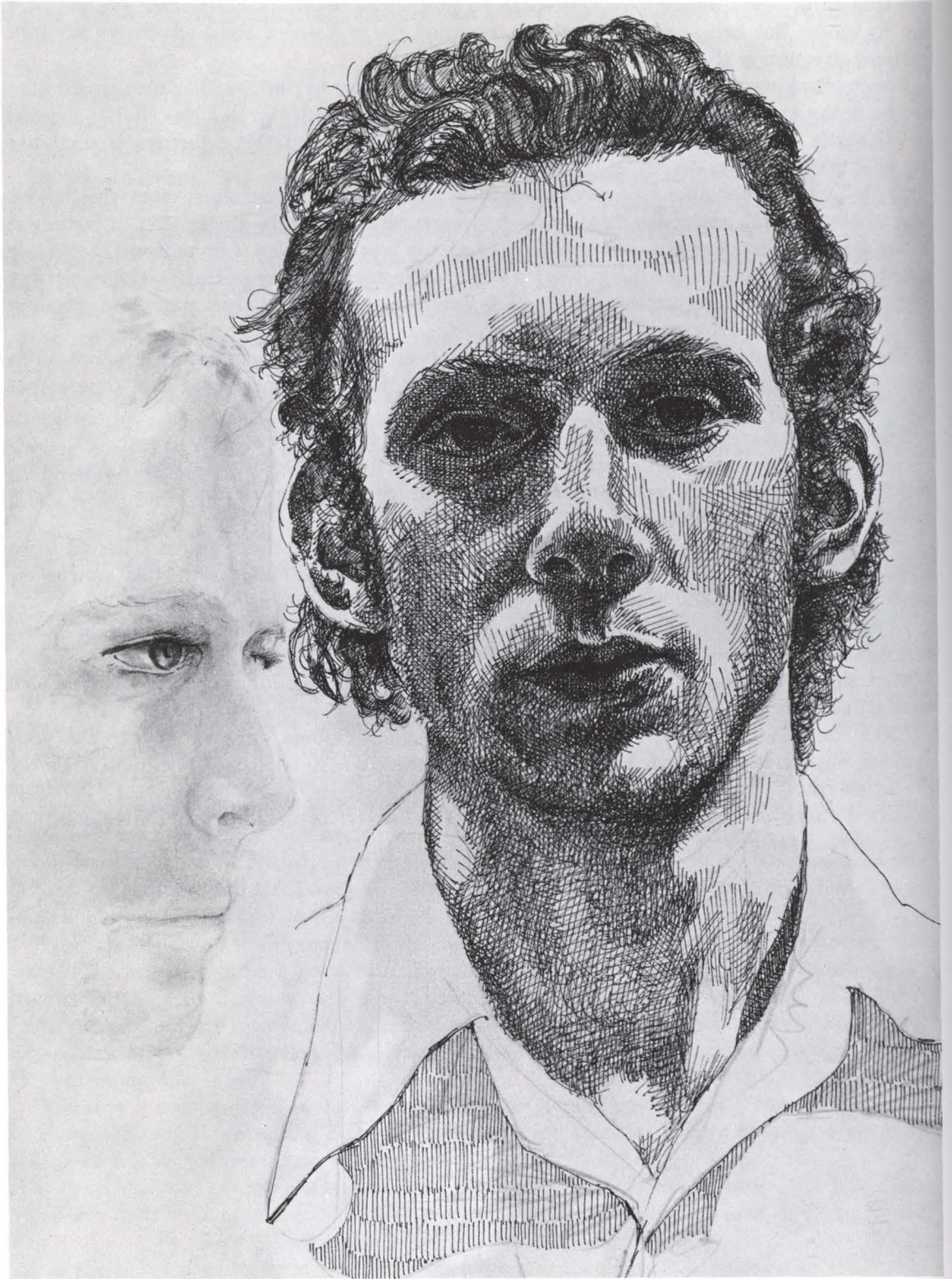
Someone has "liberated" a quart of beer from the house and we are passing it back and forth to settle our stomachs. It is flat and tastes vile.

My uniform stinks of puke—mine or someone else's—and liquor. My head pounds with last night's Southern Comfort. I long for a shower.

"Goddamned white trash," our leader says. We nod. "Should have set fire to the goddamned bughouse." We nod. For a minute I see the flames, see them running. A flicker of excitement.

Then I shake my head. I'll never do that again. Never. Over and over I'm saying, "I'll never do that again."

Stephen Minot



Dream of Beasts

"There are no roads but the first
road. All maps draw north."
Along our great bruised highways
I lead my shoulders to the wind,
turn to face the heart
that speeds on toward me
headlights in hand.

Somewhere above Canada
light spreads like honey across
the ribs of beast feeding
on evenings and wine,
hips like the horns of cows.
No one knows where they came
from, or even
what they speak.

Down the first road they come
wading in the mist their hooves receive.
I meet them in my travels and
step aside to let them pass.
All maps draw north, and when
I turn to wish them southward
their hips are highways
to the wind.

Gigi Bradford

SONG OF PERPETUAL PEDRO

Standing on the river winding his watch
Pedro is a perfect tense, coiling
Thirst around my wrist.

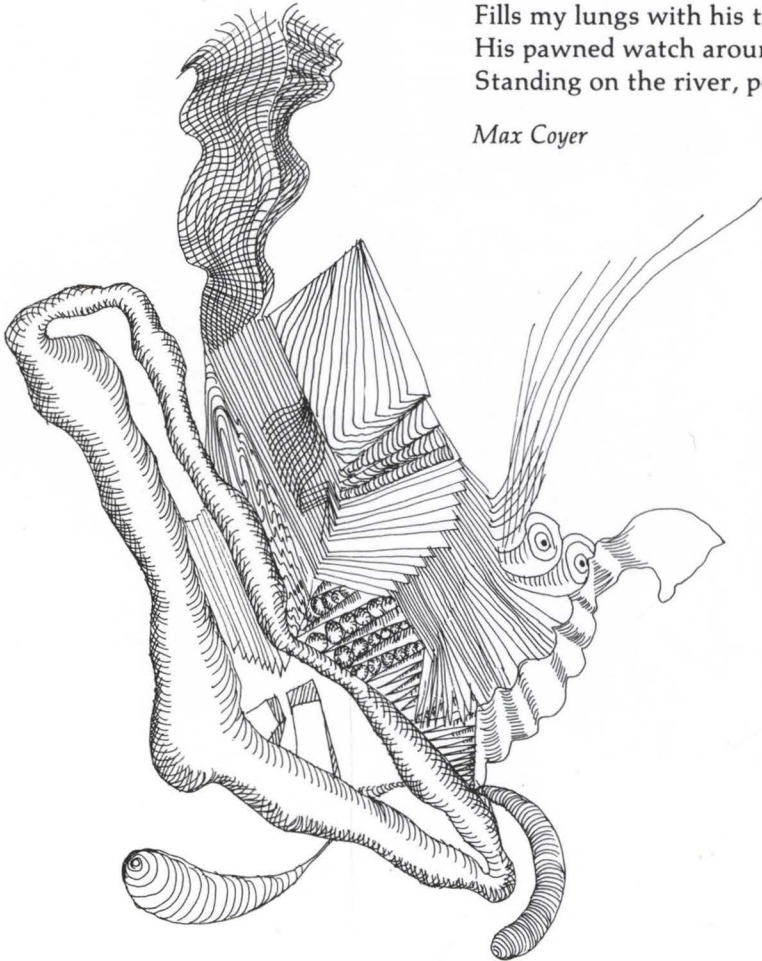
He is a spring at which
Cannibals drink, I open my mouth but
Drown in the words dripping through

My hands grabbing at Pedro, the water's
Sentence, the buoy of Time staring at
A timeless watch. He detaches his hand

And my thirst is rescued from the river,
A water-logged face nearly unwound, he
Presses his lips against my thirst and

Fills my lungs with his time, winding
His pawned watch around my speechless wrists,
Standing on the river, perfectly still.

Max Coyer

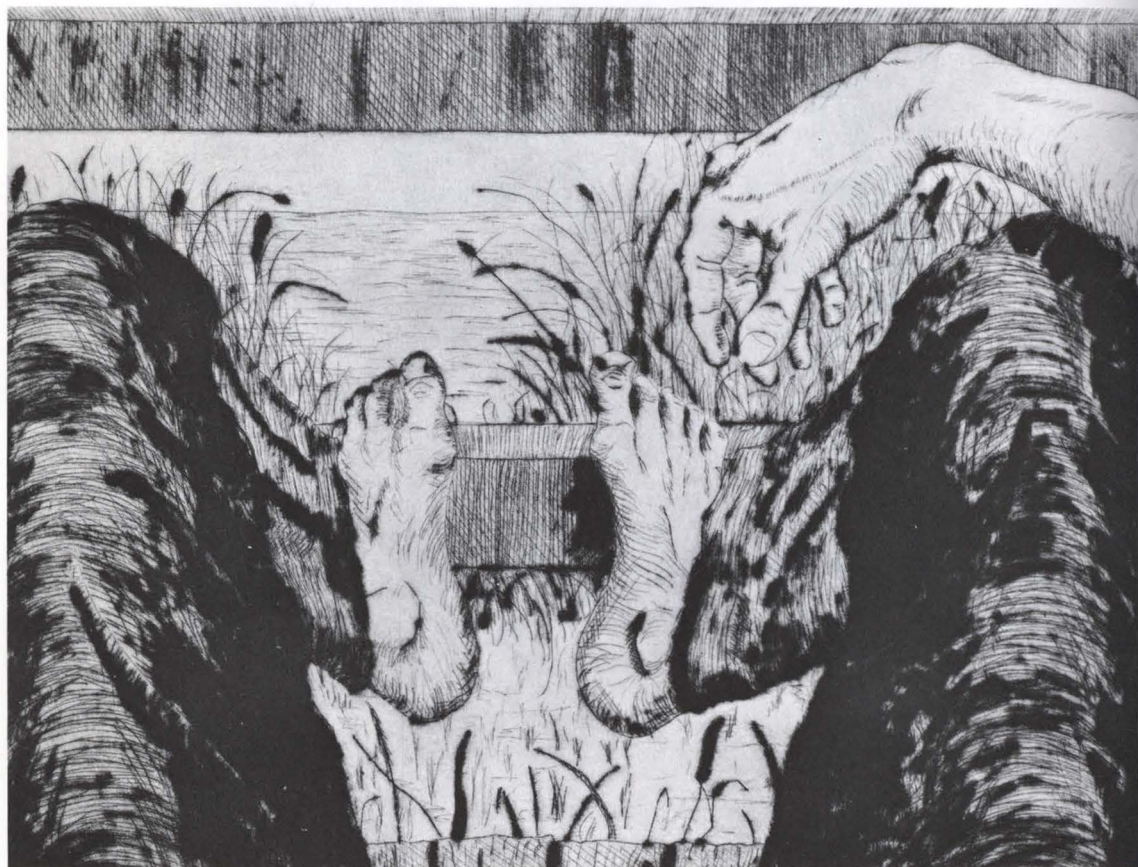




SNOW IN APRIL

it was the moon along my spine made me
shiver so. i did not recognize
the arm of your emotion as it caught
me up and left my hair smelling of man-
darin oranges. since
then there has been a small
explosion within
me. blood bonds are burst
but lines untangle with
time alone. we are in knots. thank
god we are in knots
and know to make the
most of our time alone together.

margie erhart



Birds of a Skylight World

Whistling shadows
Bloodless tapping vines
A thousand birds are burning
Pressed to slate.
The surface of things are bald
And cold
This afternoon before twilight.
It is
 so quiet
High where the birds are
In a skylight world a gabled earth
At night
 they know
Deliberating on an endless space
To what ice-broken
January
Branch to go.

Barbara Knudsen

FLYING ON A CLEAR DAY

Trying to tell you how
the formations of clouds
can reflect a life
the city streams out below
like a graveyard,
each building marking a form of death.
Up here
your voice reaches me through blue air;
the sound is of clear wind.
We are rushing through a stratosphere
propelled by our own understanding,
charting unfamiliar altitudes,
knowing at any moment
our small craft could be shot down
into some well-known desert.
You have told me again and again
that these are dangerous regions,
your body leaning towards the sky.

Paula Klein

SMILE

December 20, 1971. The goddamn horn kept blasting and I wanted to run for cover shouting 'AIR RAID, AIR RAID, AIRRRR RAI AIAIAIDD!! It made me think back to the time my elementary school principal told us about three pigs who built air raid shelters. Got me so damn scared I slept with my pillow over my head for a month. You shouldn't tell little children about those things. Air raid? Wasn't no air raid this time only a car horn. It went on and on and on and on and it wouldn't shut up. I tried to pull Tina's hands off of the horn, but she was hugging it away from me with strength I didn't even know was in her. She pulled the car to the curb and kept it there without letting go of the wheel or the horn. I watched the cop car come. It stopped and a cop jumped out and walked over. "Whatcha mean pulling over like that and making all the noise with the horn, lady? You drunk?" He was bending into Tina's window. She looked up at him and started to sob.

"Get her out of my car. Get her out of my car. GET HER OUT!" Tina pointed at me. The one cop at Tina's car signaled to the other cop in his car to come over. This second cop was tall, he had brown hair and green eyes and he was also kind of broad. I don't know why I just sat there, none of me could move, my eyes followed him as he walked to his partner and as they talked and finally as he walked over to my door and opened it. Then I kicked at him like I never kicked at anything before. He picked me up and carried me to his car. I kicked harder. He started talking, but I didn't listen to none of what he said, I just kicked. I wanted to get away. I wanted to get away. I WANTED TO GET AWAY.

November 3, 1971. SMILE. Shit. I sat on the bottom of the stairs at the Community Center part of the North Avenue Presbyterian Church and waited for some lady named Tina Cerrina. 'SMILE, Hotline and Help,' the words were painted in purple letters on the glass part of the wooden door. I didn't feel like smiling. All I could think about was that I wanted to kick the hell out of my mother, my f-o-s-t-e-r mother, for sending me here. Help? Shit, I didn't need none. I tapped my foot against the cracked black tile. The whole floor was sort of a mess of black and white faded clumps of linoleum. Step on a crack, break mother's back; step on a line, break mother's spine. This curly-haired lady walked down the stairs missing all the cracks. When she got to the bottom she looked down at me. "Laverne?"

"Yeah." I jumped up. She smiled up at me and then she turned and unlocked the door.

"Come on in. I'm Tina Cerrina, do you want a soda or coffee or something?" Her voice was real cheery. Fuck, I didn't want no soda, no coffee, no nothing. I wanted to go away but instead I sat in an old brown leather lounge chair. The leather was cracked and the chair was lumpy and uncomfortable. When I found an easy way of sitting I looked up at Tina and saw that she was smiling at me from behind a desk.

"I'm glad that you came, Laverne. SMILE is a small organization not very much like the television hotlines, is it?" It wasn't much like television at all. Washed out gray carpet, old chairs, cracked wooden desks, some bookcases, and a blackboard with names and phone numbers written on it.

"Guess not." I looked away from her. That sweet voice she used made me want to vomit. It was very cold in the room and I thought that maybe if I shivered a little she'd think I was freezing and let me go. I chattered my teeth at her but didn't say nothing.

"Oh, you're cold! Not much heat comes down here. We're going to get an electric heater soon. It'll be warm for winter." I stopped chattering my teeth. Tina leaned back in her chair and it creaked. "There must be something that you want to talk about?"

"Nah. My mother said to be here or else. Well, I'm here."

"We're not going to torture you." Tina laughed. "How about school? Do you like it?"

"I like it fine."

"You have a lot of friends?" She held one hand in the other on top of the desk.

"Guess so."

"Have a hobby?" I smiled. She didn't seem so bad. I started telling her about my drama teacher.

"He said I could have a part in the spring play. Maybe I'll get a big part. I'm the best one in the class" The words kept coming out and Tina sat there with her big smile and watched me. I looked back at her big, round eyeballs. She talked a little after I finished. and then the phone rang.

"Smile, can I help you? She listened and then she said 'hold on a minute' into the phone. Tina covered the bottom of the receiver with her hand and told me that I should come back the next Tuesday and that we'd talk some more.

November 10, 1971. The door of SMILE was open this time and I walked in expecting to find Tina but instead there was this freckle-faced girl with straight brown hair sitting at the far desk. I knew her from school. In Junior High School she got me suspended. Freckle-face. Shit. Once she had a plaid dress that tied around her waist. It was full of red and blue and green. She would lend me money. I would ask and she would give. But all of a sudden she said she didn't have no more money. "No money?" I had said. "No money? Shit. You better bring me some money tomorrow."

We were standing outside the art class in early spring. Soap sculpture, I had my razor blade with me that I had been shaving my bar of soap with. I took it out of my pocket and showed it to her. And then I took her hand and rubbed it against the top of the blade. Hell, it was just a little cut that I gave her. Just a little cut. But she had to go run home to her mother, all scared. Shit, I wouldn't have done nothing. I was just sort of saving up for a dress, a plaid dress just like hers. Freckle-face. I shook my head. SHIT.

She squirmed behind the desk. "Laverne?" She pretended not to know me. I could tell she was scared and that made me glad.

"Yeah, I'm Laverne."

"Tina said that she'd be a little late. Come in and sit down."

"Does it matter where?"

"No, sit wherever you like." The phone rang and she turned to answer it. I should have sat down right on her lap. "Smile, can I help you?" Her voice stuck in my mind and kept repeating over and over. "SMILE, CAN I HELP YOU? I CAN. I CAN SMILE. Help you?" She couldn't help no one.

"Hi Laverne, how are you today?" Tina walked in and sat behind her desk. She was wearing wool plaid pants and they made her look fat. I told her that I was fine, and she told me that now that we knew each other we should have a more serious talk. "Okay?"

"Yeah." Well, it wasn't okay.

"Your mother. I think we should talk about how you feel towards her . . ." I tuned her out. Freckles was busy talking into the phone.

"Smile, can I help you?" Can I help you? Can I help you? Help you? SHIT. SHIT. "Smile . . ." I wanted to tell her that I couldn't since looking at her turned my stomach but Tina had stopped talking and was waiting for me to say anything.

"My mother," I said, "Is dead." I smiled and rolled my eyes. Tina's upper lip twitched and I could tell that she was getting excited. I could just tell. "The lady who takes care of me is my f-o-s-t-e-r mother, a prison guard and a real bitch." Tina's jaw dropped.

"Laverne, why do you say that? Your mother feels . . ." I knew what my mother felt. Didn't want to hear no more of what this Tina Cerrina was saying so I turned to watch Freckles. She was blushing. Fucking blushing! Didn't become her at all; her whole face clashed.

"You can try dances. Do you belong to any school or church groups? Because if you don't and would like to, I could give you the names of some organizations in your area." Freckles was just gushing into her telephone. She bit the eraser off of her pencil. "You're not serious?" She bit down on the wood of the pencil. Crunch. "A definition of masturbation?" She was bright red now. "Umn, do you have a dictionary?" Crunch. "Me?" She was real red and sucking on that pencil real hard now. "You must be kidding!" BANG. She slammed down the phone.

Tina was finishing her half-assed speech about my mother. "She loves you." Tina looked up.

"That why she hits me? You know she hits me. Throws things at me." I rolled my eyes again.

"Laverne, are you telling me the truth? Your mother said that she never touched you."

"She lies."

"Laverne, I want to help you, you know that, don't you?" I got up off of my chair and walked around Tina's side of the room. There were all kinds of crackers sitting on one of the shelves, I took a box and stuck my hand in it and started to squeeze the crackers.

"I guess." I took my hand out of the cracker box. It was covered with little orange cracker crumbs and I wiped the crumbs onto my pants.

"Well, if I'm going to help you, you're going to have to tell me the truth. Does your mother really hit you?"

I was mad now. I had just told Tina that my mother beats me. I put my hand back in the cracker box and took out a handful of crackers and began crushing them on the corner of Tina's desk.

"She hits, I told you!" I threw some cracker dust at Tina.

"Hey, I was just making sure. I believe you, really. Okay?"

"Yeah." I put my hand back in the box and took out a cracker and ate it. Tasted real good. Sort of a cheese flavor. A cheddar cheese flavor.

"Look, I think we've had enough for today. I have to leave for a meeting in a little while. Next week we'll play a sort of game. It's called role playing. You'll get a chance to show me what a good actress you are. So, I'll see you next week." Tina got up and walked over to the corner of her desk and began brushing cracker dust into the garbage pail. "You know, I think we're really making progress. Really getting somewhere." The phone rang, since Freckles was busy on one line, Tina picked it up. "SMILE, can I help you?" I walked up the dirty stairs.

November 14, 1971. My mother went out and left me in this house with her daughter, her r-e-a-l daughter. Shit, I want to go out too. But no, she tells me, "Laverne, you gotta stay and watch Frances." The kid is upstairs crying, probably walked into a door. I don't care, I'm just mad that I'm locked into this house when the television don't even work. Fuck. Frances started to cry real bad so I went upstairs to see if she was bleeding. The kid jumped out from behind a door and yelled, "BOO!" Then she ran away from me.

"Frances?" I ran after her making my voice seem real sweet. "Frances, you come now, come to Laverne." She ran into my mother's room and dove under the bed. "If you come out I'll give you a chocolate chip cookie." She slid out and walked to me slowly. When she came

near enough I grabbed her and threw her over my lap. Frances was crying. I told her to shut up but she wouldn't listen. My hand looked a little red and I decided not to hit her anymore. I picked up Frances and threw her into her room. I liked her room. Real pretty. Flowered wallpaper. Now, I always wanted flowered wallpaper in my room but my mother, my f-o-s-t-e-r mother, would tell me that it was too expensive and then she went and gave it to her little Frances. It's enough to make my stomach turn.

I put my hand on Frances' back and patted her. She stopped crying. Frances is a cute little kid. Real cute. Too cute. I put my finger under her little yellow dress and ran my nail down her back. Shit, sounded more like she's howling then crying. The kid's only five. Christ, I can't even remember who owned me when I was her age. I walked out of her room and closed the door tight.

In the kitchen there was no good food. I wanted ice cream but there was only ice cream cones. A lot of good an ice cream cone is without ice cream. I took a chocolate covered graham cracker instead and sat in front of the television. And then I remembered that the television didn't work. The television didn't work. IT DIDN'T WORK! I took my chocolate coated graham cracker and rubbed it into the Teeveescreen.

November 17, 1971. "Okay, now Laverne you go sit in the chair behind the desk. You're your mother. I'm you. I've just come home from school and it's very late." I put my feet up on Tina's desk and gave her a good hard stare.

"What was it this time?" I pointed my finger at Tina.

"Nothing." She was pretty good at being me.

"It had to be something. What kept you? Hanging around the halls bothering people and missed your bus and had to walk, right? Sure, and in a little while the principal will call me and tell me that you've been suspended, FOR A CHANGE."

"I wasn't bothering anybody." She yawned.

"Don't lie."

"I'm not lying."

"You sure are. I never, never, met a bigger liar. Gonna have to beat you, I am." I got up and walked towards Tina.

"I missed the bus, that's all."

"That's not all. It's not. IT'S NOT! IT'S NOT!" I put my hands on her shoulders and shook her. Her shirt was a bright red, a nice soft material. I dug my nails into it.

"Laverne, I'm glad you got into a part but I think that's enough. Go and sit down. Stop that now. Okay?" She tried to wiggle away from me but I couldn't let her go. "Laverne, let go." Freckles walked in the door and I didn't know whether she was going to come over and bash my head in or run back up the stairs. Shit, I always thought that those places taught you to be cool, calm and collected, just like the man on television said. I let go of Tina and walked over to my seat and sat back down. I wanted to walk over to the electric heater and turn it off, it was so damn hot in that office, a whole bunch of sweat was running down my back.

"SMILE, can I help you?" Tina picked up the phone. She looked okay. "Hold on one minute please, Amy, you take this call." Freckles walked to the far desk and picked up the phone. "Okay Laverne, tell me who you were when you were shaking me? Your mother or just you? Tell you what we are going to do, we're going to go back to when you were shaking me. You're going to sit in the chair and I'm going to be you. Ready?"

I sat in the chair and waited for her to hit my shoulders and I didn't move as she pushed me back and forth and I laughed. But she didn't stop. She kept shaking me and I felt my

mother, my f-o-s-t-e-r mother's fingernails in my back. I pushed my elbow into her stomach and got up. I felt my fingernails dig into the carpet as I bent over to take off my shoe. The carpet was real soft and I kept thinking of the gray fibers that were mixing with dirt already stuffing my fingernails. My arm pulled back and then thrust forward; it hit the screen of the fireplace and fell down. Tina walked over to the fireplace and got my shoe. I was shaking. Not in big shivers but in little twitches all over my body. I grabbed the shoe from Tina and put it on my foot.

November 21, 1971. The first thing I saw when I peeked through that door with the big purple letters was Tina's lipstick. It was red. A kind of big and bright Santa Claus color. I told Tina "Hi" and sat down in the cracked leather chair. "Well I'm glad you're back," she says and tells me that we're going to have to work at controlling my temper. Then she stood up behind her desk. I saw that she was wearing red pants of a sort of dried blood color and she lit a cigarette. I wasn't used to her smoking so I just sat back and watched her.

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?" Tina pushed the cigarette up to her mouth real slowly and breathed in.

"My mother has a daughter."

"Oh, is she older or younger than you?" She breathed the smoke up and out.

"Younger."

"What's her name?" Tina's hand took the cigarette away from her mouth slowly and put it in an ashtray covered with Smile stickers and let it sit.

"Frances."

"Do you like her?"

"She's okay." I didn't want to talk about Frances. That kid was no fun.

"It's important that you tell me how you feel about your sister because . . ." Sometimes Tina had that habit of rambling on and when it happened I just wished that I could stuff her mouth and make it shut up. The cigarette was still sitting in the ashtray and so I reached forward and picked it up. Looked kind of good in my hand. I rolled it around between my fingers a little. Freckles was doing her bit in the phone. She was talking softly and that made me mad cause I wanted to hear what she was saying. The cigarette was burning close now and its fire was feeling warm. It made me think of the match-burning-through-a-dollar-bill-contest that me and Joel Austen had one day.

Joel and me were standing in the downstairs lunchroom of school. He told me that we'd have a throwing contest to see who could throw their lunchbag into the garbage basket first. I said that it didn't seem like much fun. My idea was to hold a dollar bill close to the top of each other's hand and see who moved away first when the cigarette burned close, if you didn't move and the cigarette burned through then you would win the dollar. He thought it was a good idea. I pulled my hand away before the match could burn through but I had waited longer than Joel so I thought I should win a dollar from him. But he wouldn't give it to me. Shit, I hit him. Right in the eye. It was a perfect shot and I was proud. Was I ever proud!

"And so it's important for me to know how you feel about your sister." She must have remembered about the cigarette because she put her hand near the ashtray and started to feel for it. I put my own hand forward and close to hers with the burning Marlboro filter in it. I guess my hand was a little too close cause I touched her with the filter tip and she jumped.



HER'S DAY
1908

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

"This what you're looking for?" I put the tip in her hand, burning-side pointing up into the air.

"Yes." She smiled. "Laverne, so tell me what you really feel about your sister."

"I told you. She's okay. Only a little kid, that's all." I wished that she would stop asking me things in doubles. Her questions were like the ones my guidance counselor, Maggie Seidenstein would ask. Old Maggie was short and fat and old. She looked like a crow, long nose and all, and old lady shoes. Those black shoes with the laces that the fat of old people's feet stick out from. She would waddle, always waddling right out of her office when she saw me. A lot of times she'd ask me questions in that nasal-teacher voice. She was about as tall as my knee-caps and I always thought it was funny that she was my boss. Oh, she was nice about it, I suppose, gave me tea and cookies, "I baked them myself and you have to have one," in between telling me that I had to start doing some work or I'd fail math and "we both know that math is so important, right?" And then she'd start in about english. I could never figure out how so many damned subjects could be so "important."

"What do you feel when you get mad at your sister? I know you must get mad at her. It's only human. I used to get mad at my younger brother all the time. Once I even bit him!" Tina giggled.

"Did he bleed?"

"No, but do you ever do things like that?"

"I love Frances, I'd never bite her."

"Well what do you do when she gets you mad? What do you do when you're sitting down watching television and she cries and your mother says that you have to go upstairs and watch her? Or when she gets into your clothes and makes a mess out of them? What do you feel when she walks up to you and jumps on your back and wants a piggy-back ride and you have a headache?" I saw Frances sitting on the floor of my closet chewing on the shoelace of my favorite shoes. Shit.

"I HIT HER . . . very softly and tell her not to do it again." I looked at Tina and rolled my eyes.

"I see." She wrote something on a piece of paper.

"What'd you write? Was it about me?"

"It was just a reminder for me."

"A reminder of what?"

"Oh, just that Amy has to leave early and I have to remember to lock the place up."

"You sure?"

"I wouldn't lie to you." Her big red-lipped smile made me think of a clown's mouth; she'd wash it off when she got home.

"Smile, can I help you?" Freckles had picked up the phone. "What was that?" She had started to eat another pencil. This one was red and white striped and looked like a candy cane. "You're writing a what?" Freckles bit down on the pencil and then licked her lips. "A suicide note. Is anybody in the house with you or are you alone?" Eraser particles were now stuck between Freckle's white teeth, little orange pieces of dirt. "What? You want to know how to spell suicide? No, not S-E-W-E-R" The pencil twirled between her upper and lower jaw in a spiral motion. "A suicide prevention week poster, I understand. Sure. Ready? Capital S, Capital U, Capital I . . ."

I yawned. Tina said that it was getting late and Freckles hung up the telephone. I said goodbye to Tina and walked up the stairs after Freckles. She was sitting on the outside step of the church.

"Hi." I smiled. She said "Hi" softly but didn't smile. She just stared straight ahead. I

asked her if she was scared of me but she said that she wasn't. I could tell she was lying cause she got up and began to pace. "You have a nice coat. What's it made out of?" I walked up to her and felt the material. Looked like she was holding her breath. The coat was a kind of tweed material with some green and a little red and brown and it had a hood. I asked if I could try it on but she mumbled that it was too cold out to trade coats. "Well, it's a real nice coat." She said that she was glad I liked it. I asked her whether she could lend me some money since I didn't have any and it was a long walk home and it would be nice to ride in a heated cab. "Money? Well . . . my father is picking me up. So I didn't take any money. He should be here soon."

"You're lying. I saw you walk out to the candy machine and buy a Hershey's with almonds."

"I'm not lying, Laverne. I only had enough money for the candy bar."

"You're lying." I put my hand in her pocket. "Well there's no money in there. Do you still keep your money in your shoe?" I turned her around by the shoulders. Looked like she was going to cry. "Don't be getting upset, I was only asking. That car pulling in must be your father. Think he'd give me a ride?"

"Well, I don't know . . . where you live?" Her father's car drove up and Freckles jumped in and they both went away.

December 15, 1971. I saw Tina Cerrina in a movie theater. She was wearing a pink sweater. A soft pink sweater. Stomach rolled out of the bottom of it and into some guy's hand and he rolled it around some more. I sat back in my seat and ate my popcorn. The butter had melted through and it tasted good. The movie was about up to the part where the director wakes up and finds his horse's head in bed with him. Tina was sitting real close to that guy. I threw some popcorn at them to sort of say hello and she turned around and made a face. *Godfather*, shit, it was some movie.

I sat back and waited for that horse's head to come and when it did, all that blood, I just couldn't believe it. Made me wish that I knew someone who had horses. Freckles was the type who would have some. Probably die if she found a horse's head in her bed. I spilled my popcorn because I was laughing so hard. The lady next to me says, "Watch your popcorn or your going to get a cleaning bill." I didn't want a cleaning bill but I didn't feel much like watching my popcorn either. I asked her if she wanted some. All she could say was "SHHHHHH." Movie didn't seem so much fun with that lady sitting next to me, and I only came for the horse's head anyway so I got up from my seat and went into the lobby.

I stood in the corner by the water fountain and lit a couple of matches. They burned out and didn't set anything on fire but the ticket-tearer came to me anyway and told me to stop. I didn't feel like stopping but he was big. After a while all the people started to walk out and I saw Tina again. I waved but she didn't wave back, just brought her arm around that guy she was with.

December 18, 1971. She left me with Frances again. I took the kid for a walk. We ended up by the church at this alley that had a window where you could see into SMILE from. I let Frances go off by herself, never went that far; she couldn't walk that fast. I crouched down, close to the window and on top of a mess of pebbles and broken glass. I could see Tina sitting at her desk and writing a lot into a folder. Freckles was there too, talking away on the phone. I could almost hear her. "SMILE, can I held you? Help you? Why should I help you? SMILE!" She had a voice like a mumbled whine.

I scrunched my face up to the window and breathed. Made me feel sort of like a bull. When I got the window good and steamed, I sat back and drew faces into it. Steam went away quickly and left dirty lines. I banged on the window and Freckle looked up and turned away. Tina walked over and stretched the curtains across so that all I could see was green backing cloth. Dark green and ugly. My fingers were skimming the ground around them, picking up pieces of glass and large pebbles. I threw a couple of handfuls at the window. Made sort of a rainfall sound. Kept throwing more pebbles and harder. Tina called something out in a loud voice; I threw a last handful of pebbles and walked to the end of the alley.

Frances was sitting there, playing in the dirt with her hands. "Know what your mother will say when I bring you home with dirty fingernails? She'll be real mad. She will." Frances stopped playing and waddled towards me. The way she walked made me laugh. Sometimes I would spin her around and then watch her waddle, trying not to lose her balance. I took her by the hand and told her that we had to get home in a hurry. When we got to the house she was crying. Said I walked all the air out of her and she was going to tell. I threw her in her room and slammed her door shut.

It was nice being as alone as I was in the house. It had a real good quiet sound. Some houses had burglar quiet sounds that made you scared but not this one. It sounded fine. I picked up the phone and dialed the SMILE number. Freckles answered. "SMILE, can I help you?"

"I wanna know what you do when someone bothers you all the time?"

"Yeah."

"In what ways?"

"Well, there's this girl, see. And she bothers the hell out of me. She has this straight and stringy brown hair and freckles all over her face and she got me suspended once. Got this attitude. This goddamn high attitude and pretty clothes."

"I see."

"I see."

"Laverne?" The voice changed. Tina was talking to me now.

"How'd you know it was me?"

"Amy recognized your voice." I listened to her breathing it was sort of a pant.

"I see."

"Is someone bothering you, really? Tell me the truth."

"Yeah."

"The girl your were telling Amy about?"

"That's the one."

"I think that girl sounds a little like Amy. Why does Amy bother you?"

"I told her why . . . You bother me too."

"I don't want to bother you. You know that, don't you?"

"No, I don't. All I know is that you got a pretty pink sweater. A short pink sweater and your stomach hangs out of it. Bet he likes that!"

"Laverne, what are you talking about?" Tina's pants were getting faster.

"Well, shit, girl, you should know."

"I don't understand, Laverne. Tell me more so we can talk about it?"

"NAH. SMILE, CAN I HELP YOU? HELP YOU. I CAN SMILE. Can you, huh?"

"LAVERNE, TALK." I wanted to ask whether she was having an asthma attack. Poor Tina, needed one of those asthma sprays.

"SMILE." I put down the phone slowly cause it sounded like Frances was asleep and I didn't want to wake her up.

December 20, 1971. I wanted to get away. Had a chance to get away but I missed it. It was when Tina found out I was in the car. She was passing a golden brown Ford and not being too fast about it, either. So I jumped up from the back seat. Her face was something. Shit. I was so cramped in that back seat that I had to jump up, all dirty back there, anyway and I wanted a real ride. So when she starts passing that Ford, I jumped up and yelled out loud "Trick or Treat!" TRICK OR TREAT? It wasn't Halloween, wasn't even a holiday, wasn't even a day for a ride. Tina swallowed and then looked back at me and in a real calm soft voice without any pants told me that she'd give me a ride home. Well, I didn't want a ride home. When she turned towards my street I grabbed at her and fell over into the front seat.

"I want to go for a ride, I told you."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Around." Looked like she was going to try and drive me home again. I took out my matches. The first one made a big flame. Real bright and it sort of made everything blurry when you looked through it. Hair burns fast. Saw hair burn once.

"Want to hear about the time I saw hair burn?" I held the match in front of Tina and she kept driving. "I'll tell you about it. My mother had a gas oven. Frances' mother that is. And one day she turned on the gas and walked over to the cabinet to get the matches and then she lit a match and there was this noise and then sizzle. It was a soft, slow hum sound and when I looked at her next she didn't have much hair just a whole bunch of frazzle. She was a sight!" I lit another match. And when it burned out another. All the while I kept looking at the cars we were passing through the fire. Most of them had New York license plates. They all were sort of dirty. I saw some Buicks and a whole bunch of Volkswagons in a mess of different colors and I told Tina about each one. The best one was the Garito Construction Truck. It was real big and I never saw such big wheels on a truck. They were the biggest wheels I'd ever seen. "You ever see such big wheels on a truck?" Tina asked me which wheels I meant. I told her that I meant the ones on the Garito truck.

Guess it was when I pointed at the Garito truck that I dropped the match on Tina's lap. Happened kind of fast, the match fell and all of a sudden the siren. THAT SIREN! Tina's horn.

For a minute I thought that the green-eyed cop smiled at me. I don't know why he'd have done that; I knew that he wouldn't let me go. Kicking till my legs felt so sore! Back of the cop car must be torn up bad. My legs felt like there was no strength in them and I kept pushing them to get me loose. The seams on my pants cut into me, my knees would hit my chest and then the cop car seat and then my chest, and I had no wind left in me and wished I was Frances and could hide under my mother's, my f-o-s-t-e-r mother's bed.

Meri Adler

SUMMAWARE TALES

AHEM! HEAR YE! N' PIPE DOWN. DE GRAND BELLY-BUTTON IS HERE!



HULLY GEEZ! IS HE SERIOUS?

ME KNEES IS GONNA GIVE.



DE BELLY-BUTTON KNOWS IS FROM WAS! YOU BET!

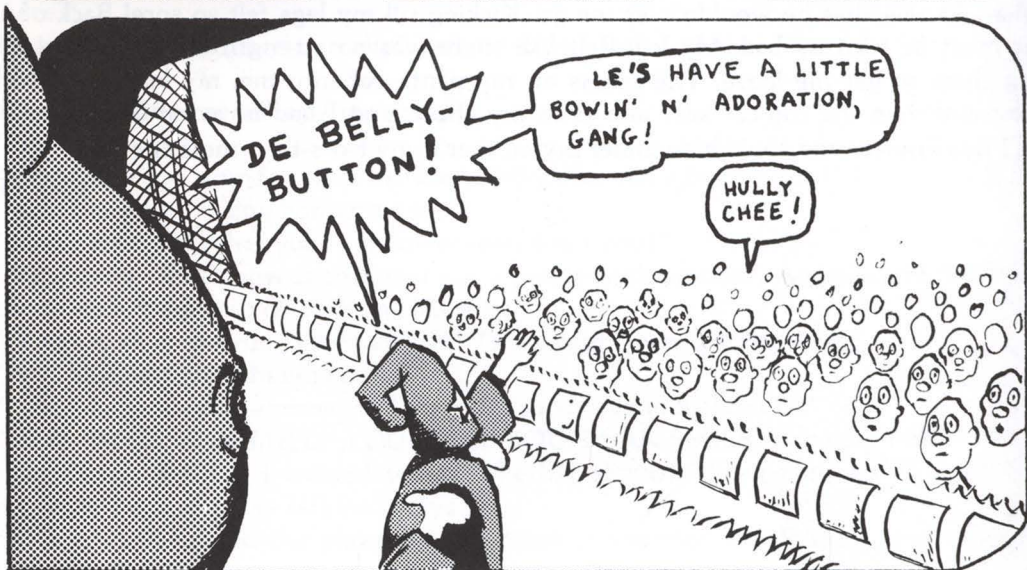
SO GETS YOUR OOOHS N' AHHS READY 'CAUSE WE IS ABOUT TO UNVEIL...



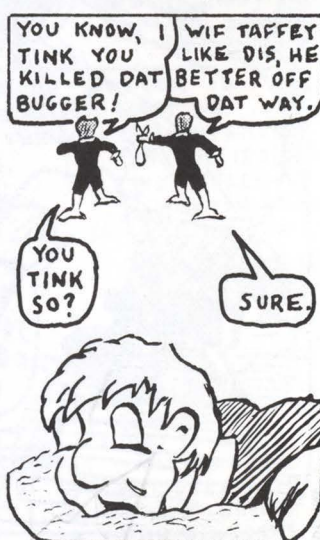
DE BELLY-BUTTON!

LE'S HAVE A LITTLE BOWIN' N' ADORATION, GANG!

HULLY CHEE!



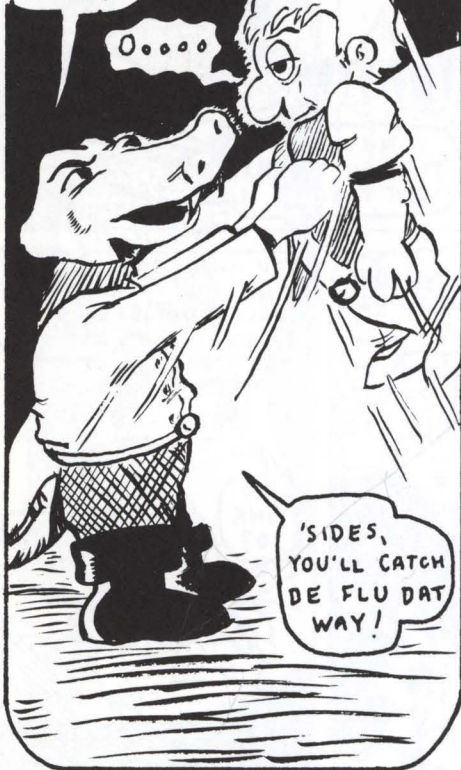
ELSEWHERE...

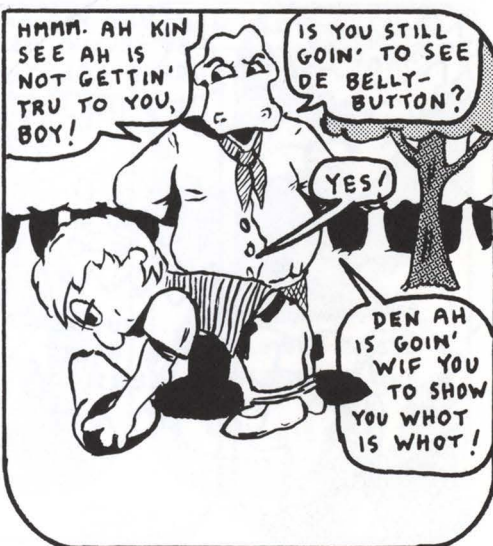
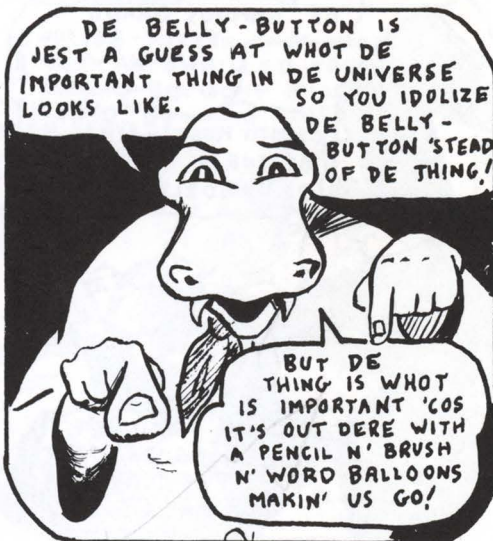


23.4859 SECONDS LATER...

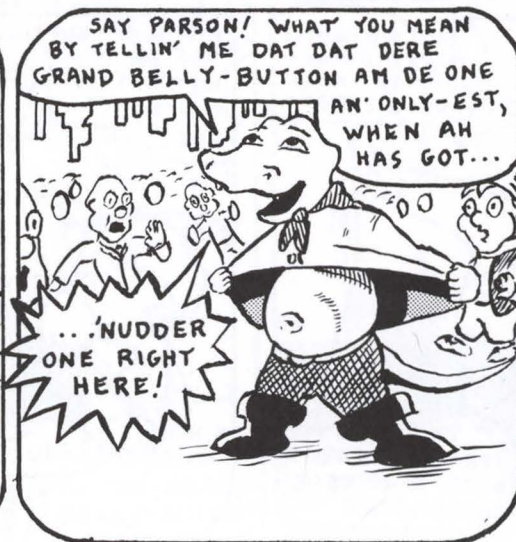


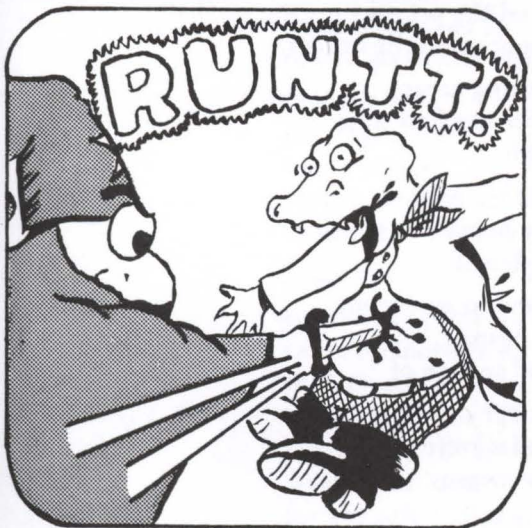
SAY BOY! WHAT'S DIS BUSINESS
YOU'RE DOIN' HERE--UNCONSCIOUS
WIFOUT NO RUBBERS ON YORE
FEETS. IT'S CONTRARY TO
DE LAWS O' NATURE IS WHAT
IT IS!





AND SO...





GREG POTTER /74

Vermeer

How cold the lake, the white tailed
ducks, the geese winding southward.
The dome wrinkles in the white dawn.

An immense column, the marbled
foyer, he saw her behind the prints,
the oils, disappearing among all the others,
the woman in blue pouring cream.

He could understand for the first time
why it all was impossible,

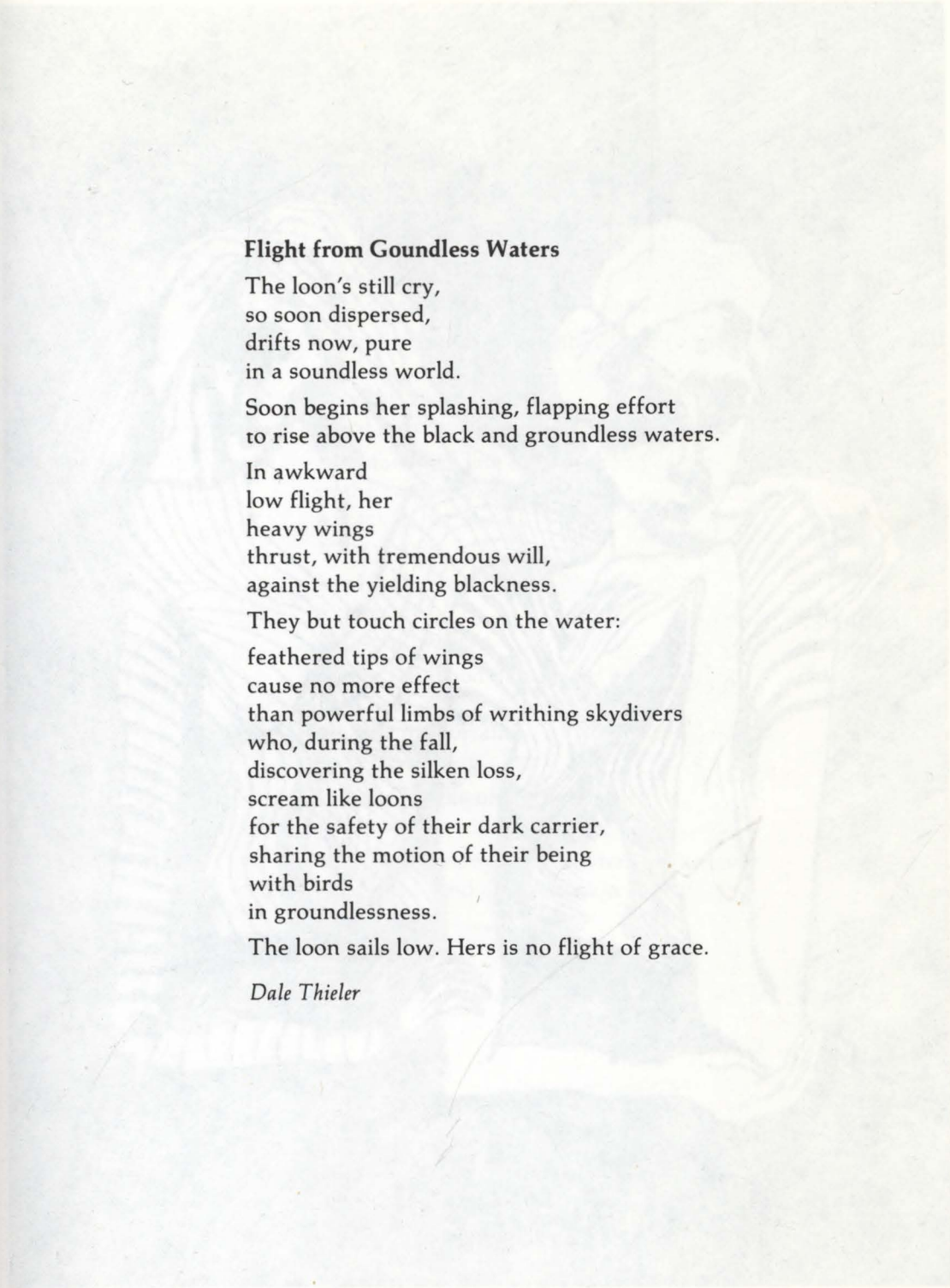
the great distance and the space
voices contribute to, of being
driven to force in self-defeat

as when one has nothing to give from
everything is given in despair,
the honed edge she had spoken of

beyond light when a lover
with a maimed arm and a knife
snatched from the tiny corpse

of a soldier drove her mad
with pain, he knew it was true,
the winter landscape that only
suggests summer and the waves
turning hard in the scattered crowd.

Hugh Ogden



Flight from Goundless Waters

The loon's still cry,
so soon dispersed,
drifts now, pure
in a soundless world.

Soon begins her splashing, flapping effort
to rise above the black and groundless waters.

In awkward
low flight, her
heavy wings
thrust, with tremendous will,
against the yielding blackness.

They but touch circles on the water:
feathered tips of wings
cause no more effect
than powerful limbs of writhing skydivers
who, during the fall,
discovering the silken loss,
scream like loons
for the safety of their dark carrier,
sharing the motion of their being
with birds
in groundlessness.

The loon sails low. Hers is no flight of grace.

Dale Thieler



Signs

Here is Eve again
after the fall
only something is worse—
no snake lowered itself shyly from a green branch
or pomegranate fell
only this black angel
rared his crooked profile like a hammer.
She stands up like a cry
in the ancient, Egyptian wind
a crack in her eye
to be naked
her hand pressing
a cloth
between her legs
where the blood flows a red eye
on a field of white
an ache of mortality
over her shoulder
it is the profile of the dead
who stares
each detail is a symbol of what she knows
a sign of a kind of concussion
it is her sin

Liz Egloff

Snoot Sprung

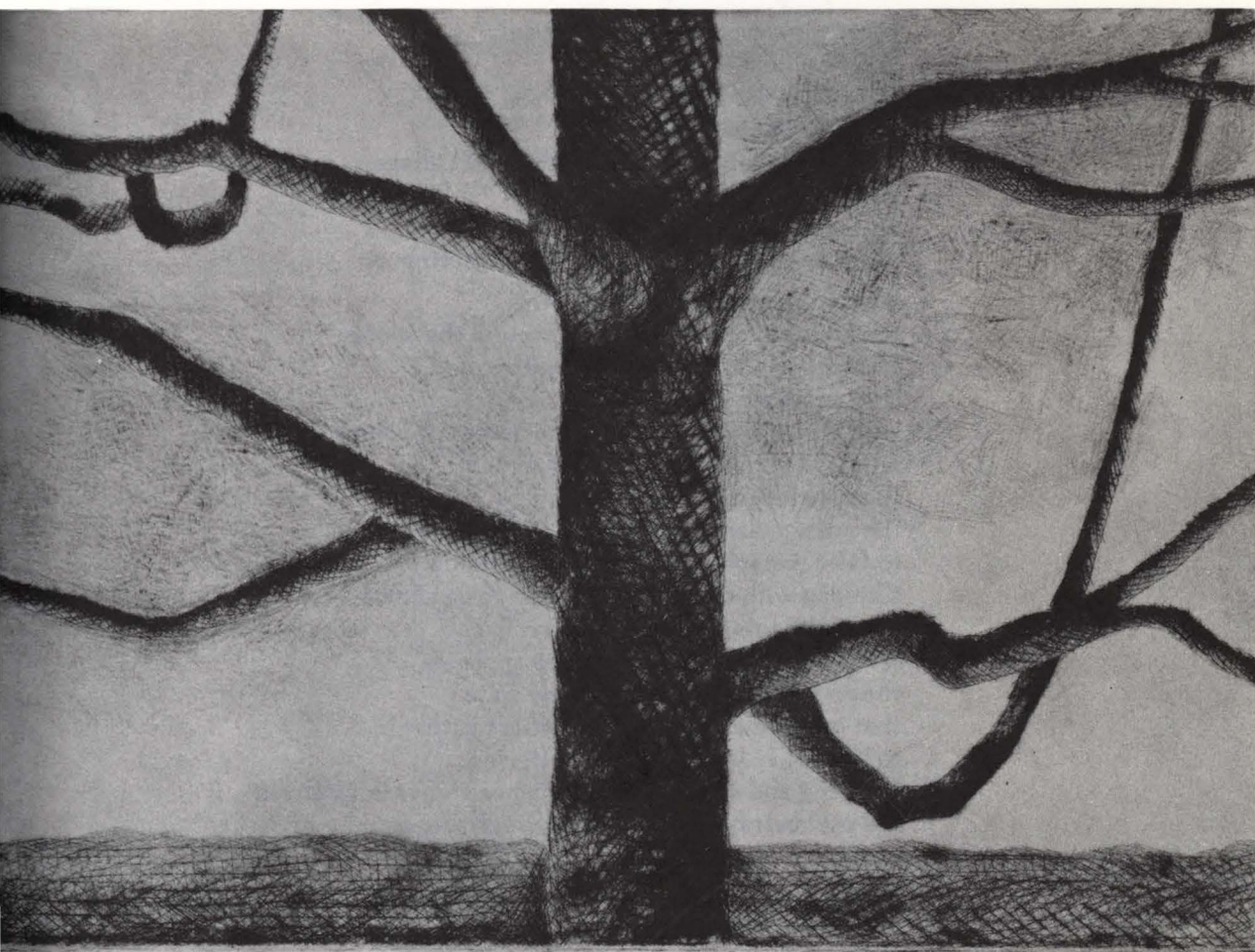
Come the first sweet lick of spring
old bears
uncurl themselves
and shudder
to shake the chill
from their lungs.

Bunching together,
they hold back
for an instant
then trundle forth
sideways snouting spurting
skunk cabbage and
squinting at each other
in the sudden
spinning
sun
deepening
into their nappy backs
deep
into their reluctant bones.

Mothers lap cubs' ears
clean out of crumbled leaves
then stop
to stick their noses to earth,
to nudge around the shiny husks
of just sprung
grasshoppers—

their caved stomachs bristle
careening
to the edge
of the swollen river
where lean salmon are
in sprint.

Nina Clark



The Poetry-Reading

What's underneath all this praise?

A set of limbs

trapped under cold red cloth,

a bundle of postures

from nightclub singers and 'forties actresses,

and the hood of bone

rented from Plath, the cap

worn by all poets who love their suffering.

Next to the podium sits a janitor

tending the tape as it travels around the spools.

He doesn't understand, and neither do I,

why someone is so respected

who bleeds her misery into the bodies of poems,

who pulled fame out of abandonment.

Posed before a family of strangers

the poet, gallantly drunk, abandons her pain

to false metaphor and crude incantation.

Clouded with crushed ashes, her voice allows

its consonants to struggle and collapse.

What a performance! Everyone applauds

the enormous risk, and the raw spite

that crippled every word. Listeners gather

to thank her for the gift of suffering.

Weeping and clapping, the audience shows it approves

the paid betrayal of the self through words.

But I

absent myself from the ruin of a woman

whom nothing, neither poem nor risk nor praise,

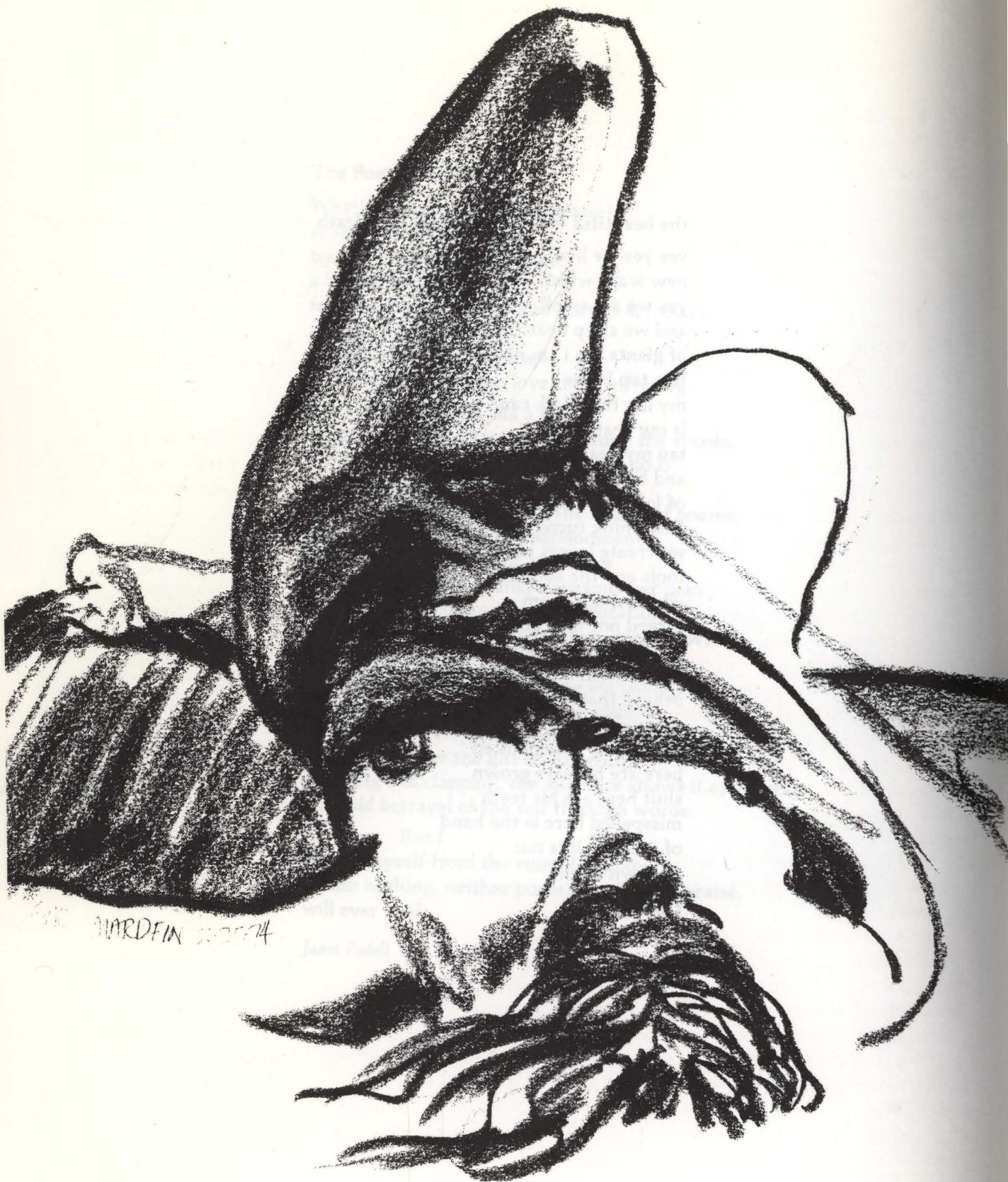
will ever heal.

Janet Podell

the beautiful woman composes her death

yes yes we live in strange caves
new walls which we dampen ourselves
yes we are small
and we sleep near the smell
of giants yes i am no fool
this top hat is
my life this black cane
is my death i will
tap my death to my life
and begin the dance
of love here are the twists
the aching turns with which
we create lovers here our
tools and the sounds
which shape them
forged not torn and
ready i can remember
times when i couldn't
believe that we were
so good here are the
eyes of my love pointed
here are his ears grown
shut here are his teeth
misspelled here is the hand
of my love it is not
my own hand

Steve Thomas



After Death's Pain

His voice blows against the curtain, the material billowing from his truth.

I have died this way before. I have danced myself to destruction, lying like a swatted fly on the cold ground, undulating till I wither. Solitude has become a sycophant, a harbinger of desperation. Life is a psychological dance on strings pulled tight and taut around a life no matter how long or short.

His head hangs like a dead man's. His arms swallow me in a discomforting warmth forcing me to drawback frozen, an unnatural cold. I see his hair frazzled, his fingernails chewed to the pinks. I look at him and can not remember loving him. Was it any yesterday that I would have died in order to possess him?

Days set in like vultures picking at my bones, tossing them like refuse into a heap of brittle carcasses. Masses of flesh huddle near me scampering from nowhere to nowhere edging their sweaty bodies against me. I hide under a thick winter coat wrapping it around me like a mother's womb.

He holds my head between his worn hands. His cracked flesh catches on the skin of my cheeks. He wipes a tear that had caught on my upper lip letting the moistness soak into his finger before pressing it against his nose. I have dreamed of that since. I have held my own hand to my cheek and wiped away tears till their wetness has permeated my body.

I die of extremes till night answers me in a hoarse voice that he can cure me. That night can shroud my body in a black liquid gauze and gently ease the blood out of me, letting me die slowly and gently without knowing. My enigmatic voice baffles us. Night wrenches me in his arms tearing the nightgown from off of me, castrating my womanhood and casting it, that torn hymen, onto a plate shoving it in my face to eat. I whisper to night that I have always had one fantasy. Night leans the plate against his face smearing the dinner over his eyes and cheeks easing his languid body on top of mine. Night. I scream. Night. I have wanted to throw a bloody tampon onto a white wall. Night shivers. The thrill of my fantasy. Night I have wanted to make love to six men at once. I grope for those men and their penises. I stretch them, pulling them, and finally taking them off, hanging them on a wall for a souvenir of the evening as some women who take photographs of the men they have been with and keep them in an album. I want a living memory, a memory I can touch and feel and smell the decay of.

My life is half over. My mind is blind to growth. I stroke my gnarled hair. I spill boiling coffee into my lap hoping that I may burn and be consumed by a holy fire, the plague of a heated wrath.

Jesus walks into my room, his white arms spread over me like a draped Madonna. My hands rise to his chest feeling his rattled bones under the material. I close my eyes straining my neck up into a heaven. I believe in monogamy, a one god. I am a Jew. Christ pulls the gown closer to his body and fades. Before me are lines of people waiting to be burned in crematories. Their heads are bent to the ground. I hear them whisper incomprehensible prayers. On their backs are signs. Russian Jew, French Jew, Italian Jew, German Jew. My sign reads discarded Jew. I yell at the guard that he is not allowed to burn me because I am not there, that I am only dreaming of living in a barrack, that I only imagine the Mogen David burned into my flesh and the yellow star pinned to my arm. The guard shrugs his shoulders and takes me in his arms shouting that he is the angel of death. I scream that he has come too soon that I am not ready to die, that I have died already in life many times before.

He comes to visit after a six months lying his coat on the same chair, leaning on the same formica table, pushing his ashes in circles in the same ashtray and says nothing has changed. I press the skirt against my body feeling the fuller lines sensing his stare as he remembers through the frayed material.

"I work now." He whispers.

"Yes."

"I work now on the night shift in a factory." His mouth bleeds over each word.

"Coffee?"

"I work on the night shift in a factory that makes things that don't sell." He spreads his hands over his face speaking through the splits in his fingers. "And you?"

"I still work." I place the coffee before him. He takes the cup in his hands letting his tongue slide into the black.

"Are you in love?" His eyes are like a child's begging me to answer him delicately.

"No. And you?"

"I'm getting married after." His sentence stops like a high speed train rolling until the screech tears through the metal wheels.

"After what?"

"After I'm sure."

"Of what?" He can not understand my coldness. Years to him have no meaning, time has been cancelled. On New Years he covers his watch and clocks in the house with black.

"That I'm in love. I loved you. I still love you." His hand reaches out to me. His touch plagues me.

"That was long ago. I have grown since then. Love has no meaning."

"But have you tried?"

"I don't care to."

Men sing songs of romance till women believe in them then feeling threatened they monotone their keys to sallow and bitter note letting the music become faint forcing the woman to abstract fantasies. I hear his song like an untuned lute inside of me. His chords are fated, his words toneless.

"But I love many." He fingerpaints his insincerity on my face.

"I love none. It's the same." The words are emitted from my mouth as fortunes that I have made for myself.

The dream began with a man wearing a black stocking over his face licking my legs. He would slowly go up and down my calves sighing as he breathed pushing the spit out of the nylon mesh. On television I had seen the moving camera eye tale of a fire. The fire was in a two hundred year old building of virgin white brick stained at the bottom by slum grease. The camera lens moved like the nightmare's tongue up the side of the building to a window where ten black hands, pitch black women's hands grappled at the decayed bricks, nails dug into palms, fingers soldered into fingers, their burning bodies screaming as the roof of the building crumpled on top of them sending their charred bodies to the street crowd. I offered myself to the man spreading my legs so that he could stare. His eyes began to move with his tongue, rolling from each pore of my body to the next. He layed the palms of his hands over each of my nipples. I parted his claws and forced his nails into my breasts. The burned black hands of the women became his hands and my chest the window with no escape. His stocking scratched against my skin. I closed my eyes and let him die.

"Can't you remember?" He closes his eyes resting his hand over my face. Under the

table his legs dance moving up and down to his own music. The muscles in his forearms tense. I can feel the pull of them against my body.

"I can't remember loving you. Perhaps I don't want to remember."

"But you must. You can't forget. I was part of you."

"That part has burned. Crumpled to dust." The juncture between all the miserable yesterdays and the forgettable tomorrows swell into tears, imagined tears springing from my vagina.

He sits like a stranger before me rubbing his hands through his hair, whipping the particles of dust from off the formica table. Life is repetitious, going in one door and coming out the same door unchanged except with a different outside face, a beauty parlour of chance. My new face is cold and ugly. Lines bend around my eyes down my cheeks to my chest where prominent blue veins destroy the youthful porcelain. My new face bleeds of destruction and loneliness, it shouts discontent without opening the red mouth.

"So I don't matter?" he asks without seeing. His tongue and teeth fight the vocal chords. I want to scream at him to care, to care for the human in front of him and not the figment garbed in distorted hues of bland whites and yellows. I want to hit him, to shake him awake, to slap his controlled mouth into a configuration that is real.

"You matter. I just can't love." I tremble. I spill the coffee between the seams of my dress and then cover the stains by piling the material in layers. "Why did you come? To uncover the dead? To bring alive a corpse, an apparition of years ago? I wake in the morning alone. Brush my teeth. Put on my uniform. Go to work. Come home and die, die again and again. Can't you leave death in peace? It no longer has any meaning for you. It is alone and personal."

"But I don't want you to die. At least not die because of me." I realize again that I am lost in him. That somewhere if you cut him into a million pieces I would be wedged like a block between his male ovaries. I would be screaming to be set free.

My emotions have become savage. I am an Amazon with a spear in hand. The spear sweats out of my hand. My war mask fades with pressure, the paint masking my face with brilliant colors. I see this man before me. He touches me. I interpret his hand as love. He looks in the mirror and sees himself wrapped like an angel. I am black my friend. Black as the bitter night.

I am caught in a revolving door that mechanically goes round and round but will not let me out. I push at the glass, kicking it, pressing all of my weight against it but it continues to lock me into its futile course of going around and around and moving nowhere. A man comes into the door, a mirror of glass between us. He goes through without seeing me. I scream. He never looks behind. A woman enters. She taps the glass to catch my attention. We stare at each other, her eyes looking at my shabby clothes and frayed hair. She sighs, her breath catching like a disease and spreading on the glass. She leaves the revolving door whispering to my tears and silently screaming mouth that someday I may get out like her. A child sees me spinning. She throws her long blonde pigtails in the air and tells her mother to look at the crazy lady that goes around and around in the revolving doors.

"I won't die for anyone," I say.

"But I love you. Don't suffer. You're acting like some kind of invalid."

"I'm not suffering. I am absurdly content. I dive off my bed and always hit the floor gently.

Bruises. Wounds. No holes. See." I show him my legs pulling up the stained pleats of the material. He winces at my childhood scars wondering why after all this time they have not gone away.

I have a memory of undressing for my mother as a child. She, her tender mother's hands, patching my skin with delicate kisses hanging her head on my shoulder. We, mother and daughter, carry our struggles like birds without wings. My mother has died leaving that same discontent on my walls, that need to change wallpaper, to rearrange furniture, to hang a painting on the wall that I hate. In dreams she smooths my hair putting it into place, she fights my grammar school battles, she tells me that I am beautiful. I whisper to her that I have grown old and ugly. That I have a man in front of me now like the many men before him that cry that they love me but can not live with me. Mother, you were an unrecognized hero. I am a fool. You loved me when they left me, holding my hand through the night telling me that I was beautiful. Now silence holds me still, sifting my emotions through its strained quiet. The silence comforts me, torments me, for I alone can answer my questions. I am the lost virgin. Fate pimps me out telling me that he will be good to me. He pulls my hair and hits me leaving bruises over my body.

"How can you be content alone?" His head moves like a merry-go-round around the room. He is the painted horse throwing the little girl off when her ticket reads no more rides. "Men need men to live. You know. You can only get to know someone mentally by knowing them in bed. Interreact."

"I do. Interreact. I talk to the voices that scream within me. Each day a new voice. Each day a different mind. I've got a circus in there. A bunch of freaks that shake and paw at each other. They'll dance with me till the end. Till the whole damn music stops. Someday we'll all be cut off. Chopped off like a ligament." My answer is a lie. There is only one voice, one maddening drone that blares inside of me. An open wound of my life, that is bleeding, the skin disattached for him to see, to cry into so that the salt burns.

"Can you deal with yourself?"

"Can you?"

"I'm sure what I want but. Well. Yes. I can deal with myself. I can deal with most people. I like people."

"It's easy to deal with people when your intent is to hurt them. Why in the hell did you come?" My question sends him to the edge of his chair. His hands lie on the table top in front of him. The coffee is pushed to the side.

"I want to sleep with you." He becomes a blur for me. I look around the room trying to find something to focus on. I see a dish. A round, hand painted dish that has a label on the bottom that says, "Made in West Germany." He had given me the dish months ago. Why had I not broken it then? What stopped me from watching the china crash into smithereens? Why had I not cut myself then with the jagged glass?

"You can't. Why can't you settle for memories?"

"Because you aren't a memory for me. You're a reality."

"Damn you. Get the hell out of here. Leave me alone."

"I can't leave till I sleep with you." He grabs my shoulder pushing me into the edge of the formica table top.

"You're hurting me."

"Sleep with me."

"Now?"

"Yes. Now."

"Never."

He raises his lugubrious blonde body from the table. His chair falls to the linoleum. I want to argue with him to stay. I can not let him leave. I die and die again and the whole world seems to watch without caring. I undress him as he puts on his overcoat. I pull the pants off of his lean legs. I play with the hair on his back. I stroke his chest.

"I don't want you to leave. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have been so difficult."

"Okay. That's alright. Just settle down. Don't think the world's going to end. Everything isn't so traumatic." He sneers and I Die again.

But the world is ending. My world seems worn at thirty. I am tired and used. I want to lie down and place my hand under my dress and satisfy myself. I want to open my eyes in the morning and smile to the unknown instead of dreading every minute expecting the worst and worry when it comes late.

"I'll change. I won't fight. I won't argue about everything, I'll give you your freedom. Isn't that why you left me?"

"You can't change. We're both different now. I thought you had changed before. A little more stable and secure. I guess I was wrong. You can't change. We can only enjoy ourselves, each other for this minute, this hour together." His voice excites me, thrills me, makes me shiver, and kills me.

"But I love you."

"I love you too. But you're my friend," he says.

I have become cold, ugly, and old. I watch a soap opera and become every melodramatic character. I dress by their pain, I pant as they cry. My voice is unattached from my body, it makes no sense to my face which stares at me like a monster in the mirror. When I was young I was able to jump fences and shout through open fields. I could dance to willow trees and make forts out of dirt and mud. As a child I was porous, soaking in every idea, every mind that passed me by. Now I screen out all that does not immediately make sense. I shelter myself by making a hut out of thick mud.

"Please stay." I whine. I pull at my hair. I tug at him.

"Let's go to bed." He seems so assured, so knowing. He is as blind as I am. I want to touch him. To hold his body against mine. To tear his penis out so that he will never be able to touch another woman.

"Yes. We'll go to bed." I freeze.

He takes my arm. He gently rubs his hand over my face. I feel beautiful. I feel ugly. He leads me to my bedroom. He lays me on my bed. He takes my clothes off. I am an animal screaming for him. His mouth makes circles on my skin. His mouth presses into my vagina. I feel his erection and wonder whether he is thinking of me. I ask myself who was the last woman who touched him. How did he make love to her.

Outside the sky removes the day and forces in the night. The darkness pounds at the bedroom blinds forcing in the black between the plastic screens, I hold this man in my arms. My hands play with the hair on his buttocks then follow the narrow lines from his hips to the spread in his back feeling the patches of dried skin and sharp points of his shoulder blades. I am a corpse as he lies on top of me. My hands involuntarily drop to my sides and hold my hips pinching the flesh as he enters.

I close my eyes and see him making love to his other women. I dream of him thrusting his penis into them, caressing them, holding them as he whispers passionate nothings in their

ears so that the words excite them into a physical frenzy, an emotional insanity. Six months have passed since we loved together. He penetrates my womanhood and I could be anyone. Shades of pink and red streak the sky. I reach to the window and try to feel them. He thinks that my arm is for him and pulls it down to his back. He moans. I lay passive. He sighs and bites my ear and then says, "Lisa. Oh loving Lisa." But my name is not Lisa. My body is not Lisa. He lives through me reaching out to Lisa in my body. He raises his head, the frazzled hair flying above my face.

"I'm sorry. Sorry. So sorry. I didn't mean. I better leave." Transparent globules of salt water slothfully float down his face. I see the sky through the window. The dark winter haze shrouds my body. The colors have faded leaving a solitary star to witness my fate.

"Yes. You better leave. You should've left when you came into my life. I should've known. It's my mistake. Not yours." Inside of me his semen dribbles out. Inside of me my stomach wrenches, twists and turns, forever contortions of a past love affair. He slides over onto the white sheets, those sheets that before were so sterile and clean. His hands fold on his stomach picking at the hairs on his chest.

"Please leave." I plead with him. I beg him.

"I'm sorry."

"You bastard of a fool. You should've known. I can't be an excuse." I look up into the ceiling studying the bad paint job, cracks, the pipes, and light socket without a bulb. I hear him dressing. Time seems so slow yet so fast. I want to tell him to forget her and return to me. I want to tell him that I have a million things to tell him. That I have not finished explaining my life. He buttons his shirt and bends down kissing me on the forehead. I hear the door close after him. I hear the metal frame snapping against the wood.

Silence maneuvers itself into the bed. The sheets are like silk against my body. My finger slides inside of me rubbing the unattended moist flesh. I think of him lying next to her. Has my body sweat soaked into his so that she will smell me? I can smell her, hear her through his voice. Night bundles me in a child's snow suit. The finger slowly goes in and out pushing deeper and deeper into my vagina. I lie back on the pillow and enjoy the strained satisfaction.

Deborah Morris

in the boat during rougher winds
you were asking for broad
strokes
and i kept trying
to tell you
these
are
my broad
strokes

Steve Thomas

